

Re: Atlantic Fleet Weapons Training Facility (AFWTF), Vieques Island, PR  
Response to Public Comments on Documents developed under the January 2000 RCRA  
Administrative Order - received during the public comment period from August 7, 2002 to  
November 8, 2002, EPA Facility I.D.# PRD980536221

Dear Sirs and Madams:

Attached with this letter are the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Region 2 responses to the comments it received during the August 7, 2002 to November 8, 2002 public comment period on the work plans for investigations of formerly Navy-owned areas on the eastern end of Vieques, Puerto Rico. These work plans were developed under the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA), and pursuant to a January 2000 Administrative Order (the Order) signed by the Navy. The Order requires that an investigation be implemented at 12 discrete sites, to determine whether or not a release of hazardous or solid wastes, or hazardous constituents has occurred, and if further investigations are warranted. This is just the first step, as additional investigations and cleanup activities will be required to address the remaining areas on eastern Vieques. As the lead oversight agency for the activities being conducted by the Navy under the Order, EPA works closely with the Puerto Rico Environmental Quality Board (EQB).

In response to the comments received, adjustments were made to work plans. The EPA responses to comments, and the technical revisions that have been made to the work plans are detailed in the enclosures to this letter. Revisions were also made to the community involvement work plan, including adjustments in the interview process to include small groups interviews as well as the inclusion of an EQB representative in the community interview sessions.

Parallel to the work being conducted under the Order, the Navy is conducting an investigation of the western lands it formally owned. EPA has been collaborating with EQB in providing technical assistance and guidance to the Navy on environmental issues related to the transfer of the 8,100 acres of land on the western end of Vieques. This investigation is being conducted under a different cleanup statute called CERCLA, also known as Superfund.

Earlier this year, the Governor of Puerto Rico requested that areas be listed on the Superfund National Priority list. Any work plans and community involvement efforts currently being undertaken would be folded into any Superfund listing in the future. EPA is committed to an active and rigorous community involvement effort during the investigation and cleanup of Vieques. That commitment has already resulted in a number of community outreach efforts including: a July 2003 stakeholder meeting; a four-page community fact sheet that was distributed to individuals or groups in both English and Spanish; a public availability meeting, held in August of 2002, at which posters in Spanish and English were used to describe the RCRA process and the planned investigations; a comment period initially scheduled for 30 days but extended by 60 days for public inspection of and comment on the RCRA work plans and related documents; and, public repositories for document inspection. In addition, a grant is being made available to provide technical assistance to a community group; that grant will be

awarded this Fall. Community interviews to assist in the development of a formal community involvement plan for the eastern end of the island are also planned for this Fall. These efforts will provide a starting point for any future community involvement plan under Superfund.

As we move forward toward the investigation and cleanup of Vieques, the community's involvement and input will be key to the success of this effort. I want to thank the members of the Vieques community who contributed valuable input into the process. If you have any questions, please contact either Mr. Carlos Ramos of the Office of the Regional Administrator, phone (212) 637-3566, or Mr. Tim Gordon, of my staff, phone (212) 637- 4167.

Sincerely yours,

Walter Mugdan, Director  
Division of Environmental Planning and Protection

Enclosures